

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SMS-01 CIAE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 ICA-11
ACDA-12 COME-00 DOTE-00 EB-08 FMC-01 CG-00
DLOS-09 OES-09 /106 W
-----104349 160656Z /13

R 151355Z AUG 78
FM AMEMBASSY OSLO
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6311
INFO AMEMBASSY BONN
AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN
AMEMBASSY HELSINKI
RUDTCXAMEMBASSY LONDON 3272
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMEMBASSY REYKJAVIK
AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM
USMISSION USNATO
USNMR SHAPE
USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN, GE
USNAVEUR LONDON, ENG
SECDEF WASHDC
USLO SACLANT NORFOLK
JCS WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L OSLO 3931

SHAPE FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: MILI, PEPR, PINT, NATO, UR, NO
SUBJECT: SOVIET SHIP INCURSIONS IN NORWEGIAN WATERS: NOT QUOTE GONE,
CERTAINLY NOT FORGOTTEN

REF: (A) USNATO 7556, (B) MOSCOW 18316, (C) OSLO 3718

1. SUMMARY: DURING THE LAST TWO WEEKS, THE SOVIET SHIP
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INCURSIONS HAVE MOVED FROM PAGE 1 TO THE EDITORIALS AND
HAVE BEEN TAKEN UP BY THE POLITICAL PARTY LEADERS PARTICULARLY
THE CONSERVATIVES (THE MAJOR OPPOSITION PARTY) POSSIBLY
PRESAGING THE USE OF THE ISSUE AGAINST THE RULING LABOR
PARTY IN NEXT YEAR'S LOCAL ELECTIONS. EXCEPT FOR THE
LABOR PARTY PRESS, THE OTHER ARTICLES REFLECTING ON THE
SUMMER'S SOVIET SHIP INCIDENTS CRITICIZED THE GOVERNMENT

FOR ITS HANDLING OF THE SITUATION AND FOR ITS ATTEMPTS TO PRETEND THAT THE MATTER ENDED WITH THE SOVIET AMBASSADOR'S SLIGHTLY EQUIVOCAL AUGUST 1 RESPONSE (SEE OSLO 3718), AND THAT THE INCIDENTS REALLY WERE NOT IMPORTANT ANYWAY. END SUMMARY.

2. THERE IS EVIDENCE THAT THE GON MAY HAVE LEARNED SOME LESSONS OUT OF THE EVENTS OF THE LAST TWO MONTHS. ACCORDING TO THE PRESS ON AUGUST 12, A SOVIET SHIP LATER IDENTIFIED AS THE 5,000 TON FREIGHTER MATSKA WAS OBSERVED ANCHORED FOR TWO AND ONE HALF HOURS WITHIN NORWAY'S TERRITORIAL WATERS. THE MATSKA WAS LOCATED SLIGHTLY EAST FROM THE NORTH COAST OF FINNMARK NEAR THE SLETNES LIGHT. IT WAS NOT INTERCEPTED AND EVENTUALLY MOVED ON INTO INTERNATIONAL WATERS. THE NEXT DAY, AUGUST 13, THE SOVIET SHIP GRUMANT REQUESTED PERMISSION FROM THE VARDØ POLICE TO ENTER NORWEGIAN WATERS BECAUSE OF ENGINE TROUBLE. PERMISSION WAS GRANTED AND THE GRUMANT MOVED INTO THE SAME GENERAL AREA RECENTLY VACATED BY THE MATSKA. IT STAYED FOR APPROXIMATELY ONE HOUR AND FORTY-FIVE MINUTES BEFORE PROCEEDING INTO INTERNATIONAL WATERS.

3. THE TWO INCIDENTS RECEIVED VERY SLIGHT COVERAGE IN THE OSLO PRESS AND THE LOCAL POLICE CHIEF IN VARDØ BENT OVER BACKWARDS TO POINT OUT THAT THERE WAS HEAVY SOVIET TRAFFIC THROUGH THE AREA TO MURMANSK, THAT HE WOULD NOT RULE OUT THE POSSIBILITY OF ENGINE TROUBLE IN THE CASE OF THE
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MATSKA AND THAT IN ANY EVENT ONE ONLY SPOKE OF QUOTE BORDER VIOLATIONS UNQUOTE IN CASES OF WARSHIPS AND NOT IN SITUATIONS INVOLVING COMMERCIAL VESSELS WHOSE OFFICERS MIGHT NOT UNDERSTAND THE REQUIREMENTS OF NORWEGIAN LAW. HE ALSO NOTED THAT THE GRUMANT WAS THE FIRST SOVIET SHIP EVER TO HAVE CONTACTED THE VARDØ POLICE IN COMPLIANCE WITH THE 1968 REGULATION REQUIRING PERMISSION FROM THE NORWEGIAN AUTHORITIES PRIOR TO ANCHORING IN NORWEGIAN WATERS.

4. COMMENT: WHATEVER THE REAL REASONS ARE BEHIND THE RECENT SOVIET SHIP INCURSIONS IN NORWEGIAN WATERS, MOST NORWEGIANS HAVE CONCLUDED THEY WERE NEFARIOUS. MOREOVER, THE DISARRAY APPARENT IN THE GOVERNMENT'S HANDLING OF THE SITUATION HAS NOT INCREASED ANYONE'S CONFIDENCE IN ITS CAPABILITY TO MANAGE CRISES. NORWEGIAN/SOVIET RELATIONS ARE PRESENTLY GOING THROUGH A DIFFICULT PERIOD, AND THE GON WAS CLEARLY PUT IN A DIFFICULT POSITION BY THE SOVIET SHIP VIOLATIONS: IF IT REACTED TOO STRONGLY, THE SOVIET UNION COULD SEIZE ON THE NORWEGIAN RESPONSE AS A "PROVOCATION". ON THE OTHER HAND, IF THE GON REACTED TOO SOFTLY, IT RAN THE RISK OF BEING ACCUSED BY ELEMENTS OF THE NORWEGIAN PUBLIC AND PRESS OF

CATERING TO THE SOVIETS AND ALSO OF HAVING MOSCOW ITSELF
INTERPRET THE REACTION AS A WEAKNESS THAT COULD BE EXPLOITED.
WHAT THE NORWEGIAN GOVERNMENT ACTUALLY DID WAS TO FUMBLE
FOR TWO WEEKS, REFLECTING UNCOORDINATION AND OVERREACTION
BEFORE FINALLY ATTEMPTING TO BRING THE SORRY AFFAIR TO A
CONCLUSION BY HAVING THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN
AFFAIRS, THORVALD STOLTENBERG, DECLARE THAT THE ISSUE
WAS CLOSED.

5. WHILE THE SHIP INCIDENTS HAVE RAISED THE LEVEL OF
NORWEGIAN CONSCIOUSNESS OF THE POTENTIAL SOVIET THREAT
AND CAPACITY FOR TROUBLEMAKING, THEY WOULD NOT SEEM TO
HAVE BECOME A MAJOR ELEMENT IN THE NORWEGIAN/SOVIET
RELATIONSHIP BEYOND FUELING PUBLIC SPECULATION AS TO WHAT THE
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SOVIETS WERE UP TO. THE GOVERNMENT ALSO GAVE THE IMPRESSION
OF VACILLATION AND UNCOORDINATION IN ITS HANDLING OF THE
INCIDENTS, AN IMAGE WHICH IT SEEMS THE POLITICAL OPPOSITION
WILL CONTINUE TO EXPLOIT.
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Message Attributes

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